DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 348 703 CS 507 895

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TITLE Development and Validation of the Listener Preference Profile.
PUB DATE Mar 92
NOTE 24p.; Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the International Listening Association (13th, Seattle, WA, March 4-8, 1992).
PUB TYPE Speeches/Conference Papers (150) -- Reports - Evaluative/Feasibility (142)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS Factor Analysis; Higher Education; Item Analysis; *Listening; *Listening Habits; Sex Differences; *Test Reliability; *Test Validity
IDENTIFIERS *Listener Preference Profile; Listening Research

ABSTRACT

The Listener Preference Profile (LPP) was designed to identify habitual listening responses. Items for the LPP were generated from listening behaviors identified from a systematic review of the listening literature and modified based on administration to several pilot groups. Results of factor analyses identified four clusters (people-, content-, action-, and time-oriented listening) and were used to revise the LPP. A study was designed to validate the LPP. Subjects, 392 undergraduate students in a southern university enrolled in a basic professional communication class, were administered the LPP twice within 24 hours--first in combination with two other self-administered assessment instruments (with randomized order of elements) and then independently with items randomized in a different order. Factor analyses, estimates of internal consistency, and the prevalence of different listening preference orientations were examined. Results indicated that: (1) test-retest reliability instruments suggest stability in the assessment of listener preferences over time; (2) gender differences existed in task versus relational listening; (3) multiple listener preferences were common between listeners; and (4) 21% of the sample indicated no preference for any of the listener orientations. Findings suggest that the Listener Preference Profile is a reliable instrument and has potential as a research and/or training tool. (Three tables of data are included; 44 references are attached.) (RS)

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DEVELOPMENT AND VALIDATION OF THE LISTENER PREFERENCE PROFILE

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Presented at the annual meeting of the International Listening Association, Seattle, WA, March 4-8, 1992.

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Development and Validation of the Listener Preference Profile

Since research reports suggest that individuals differ in their orientation toward communication, one would assume that individuals would also differ in their orientation toward listening. While listening theorists have defined different types of listening used in various communication contexts (Barker, 1971; Nichols & Stevens, 1957; Steil, Barker, & Watson, 1983; Wolvin & Coakley, 1992), no existing research has investigated whether or not listeners have different preferences in how they choose to listen.

Previous research has investigated preferences for individuals to approach or avoid speaking in different communication contexts and relationships. Approach-avoidance constructs have been conceptualized in such ways as the unwillingness to communicate and willingness to communicate (Barraclough, Christophel, & McCroskey, 1988; Burgoon, 1976; Chan & McCroskey, 1987; McCroskey & Richmond, 1985; 1987; 1990; McCroskey, 1992; Zakahi & McCroskey, 1989). These instruments use an encoder rather than an decoder perspective. If people manifest differences in their willingness to speak, it would be reasonable to speculate that people also would differ in their willing to listen to various kinds of information, situational contexts, and people.

An examination of significant books and periodicals in listening provides descriptions of types of listening such as appreciative, critical, discriminative, and therapeutic (Barker, 1971; Bostrom, 1990; Roach & Wyatt, 1988, Wolvin & Coakley, 1992) and suggests that the best listeners modify their listening behavior to meet the constraints of given situational contexts. Anecdotal evidence suggests, however, that people listen more as a function of habit that conscious choice. Rather than switching to a more ap-

propriate type of listening, it appears that most listeners rely on a comfortable pattern of behavior. Therefore, it would logically follow that all people do not prefer to listen in the same ways.

Differences in the ways that listeners choose to listen are known as listener preferences. Since listener preferences are habitual responses that have been cognitively structured, practiced and reinforced over time, these behaviors have become highly automated. Fortunately, since recent research reports suggest that listening habits can be modified with incentive, knowledge, and practice (Dickson & Patterson, 1981; Smeltzer & Watson, 1984; 1985; Watson & Rhodes, 1988), one would assume that listeners can be trained to listen differently to meet the demands of various communication settings.

Listener preferences are determined by how, where, when, who, and what types of information individuals most like to receive from others. Some people appear to be more willing to listen to factual information or statistics while others appear to prefer to listen to personal examples and illustrations. Individuals also differ in the preference of communication channels (telephone or face-to-face), message formats and/or structures, and locations and/or events. A review of the listening apprehension literature suggests that listeners also differ in the level of apprehension with which they approach listening contexts. The *Receiver Apprehension Test* measures the self-reported anxiety of subjects associated with listening to stimuli in informal-interpersonal communication situations (Wheeless, 1975). The results suggest that a separate dimension of communication apprehension exits for decoders of information and that the receiver apprehension construct deals with information processing as well as psychological adjustment to messages sent by others. Therefore, it is logical to assume that differences in receiver apprehension test scores could be influenced by differences in listener preferences.

Much of the recent research in listening has focused on listener comprehension and assessment rather than on listener habits or preferences. The most widely administered listening assessment instruments (Watson-Barker Listening Test, Kentucky Comprehensive Listening Test, and Brown-Carlson Listening Test) all include subtest scores in addition to overall test scores (Watson & Barker, 1984; 1992). The Watson-Barker Listening test, for example, measures five types of interpersonal listening: listening for content, conversational listening, long-term listening, listening for emotional meaning, and following instructions or directions. Results of the scores suggest significant differences according to subtest scores for variables such as gender, age, and profession. Since there are differences in subtest scores, it would be reasonable to assume that the differences could be attributed in part to listener preferences as well as listening comprehension differences.

In addition to listener comprehension and assessment, listening research has also investigated gender differences in listening. Research reports suggest that women are better than men at verbal memory (Maccoby & Jacklin, 1974; Watson & Rhodes, 1988), decoding nonverbal behaviors such as facial expressions (Bassili, 1979; Hall, 1978; Watson & Rhodes, 1988), and that women are more accurate than men in perceiving gender-related traits (Card, Jackson, Stollak, & Ialongo, 1986). Differences have also been found in cognitive processing between men and women. The results indicate that the right hemisphere is dominant for processing emotional information. Women tend to use bilaterial hemispheric processing during listening while men use unilateral hemispheric processing (Bryden, 1980; Jones, 1979).

According to Booth-Butterfield (1984) men and women "listen for different purposes and have different goals. The primary contrast appears in task versus interpersonal understanding; males tend to hear the facts while females are more aware of the mood of the communication (p.39). In fact, listener gender differences have been

found in areas such as listening socialization (Booth-Butterfield, 1984; Boice, Hanley, Gansier, Shaughnessy & Dudek, 1984), overcoming distractions (Howell, 1982; Stockard & Johnson, 1980), conversational sensitivity (Berryman & Wilcox, 1980; Ray & Bostrom, 1990; Wheeless, 1984), interrupting behavior (Esposito, 1979; Kennedy & Camden, 1981; Smeltzer & Watson, 1986), empathy (Hanson & Mullis, 1985; Ickes, et. al., 1986), and situational contexts (Aries, 1987; Carli, 1989; Mabry, 1985). While these results do not provide conclusive evidence regarding gender differences as related to listening effectiveness, they do suggest that men and women listen differently. It is likely, then, that some of these differences could be attributed to listener preference differences.

The Listener Preference Profile (LPP) was designed to identify habitual listening responses. It is hoped that as listeners learn about how they prefer to listen that they will also learn to adapt their preferences to meet the constraints of various communication settings. The purpose of this paper is to present the listener preference construct and to analyze available data related to the validity of the instrument.

Development of the Instrument

Initial items for the LPP were generated from listening behaviors identified from a systematic review of the listening literature. Next a pool of listening experts screened the items. The first instrument included 30 items and was administered to several pilot groups to test for contextual understanding and ease of administration (Watson, 1984). After item analysis, the LPP was refined to include 24 items which were later subjected to factor analysis (Mahon, 1991; Watson & Barker, 1988).

Preliminary test results identified four clusters. Descriptive labels were given to the clusters of items reflecting differing listening behaviors. The descriptive labels have been modified regularly to clarify cluster traits and to avoid a positive or negative word association bias or valence.

The factor analysis, as reported in Mahon (1991), validated the four factors which had been observed and described in earlier analyses. However, some of the twenty-four items didn't load heavily on a single factor. Two additional versions of the LPP following Mahon's (1991) study were subjected to factor analysis. The results of the additional factor analyses were used to revise items in the current version: LPP-14-92.

Description of the Instrument

The item and factor analyses provided valuable information about distinctions among the four clusters. The most recent items used in the LPP-14-92 are presented in Figure 1. The four descriptive labels identifying the independent clusters of listening are illustrated below. The four preferences have been labeled people-, content-, action-, and time-oriented listening.

People-Oriented. Listeners demonstrate people-oriented preferences when they: show caring and concern for others feelings, identify the emotional states of others, internalize/adopt emotional states of others, or try to find areas of common interest.

Content-oriented. Listeners demonstrate content-oriented preferences when they: test or evaluate facts and evidence, welcome complex and challenging information, listen to facts before forming judgments and opinions, or favor listening to technical information.

Action-oriented. Listeners demonstrate action-oriented preferences when they: jump ahead and finish thoughts of speakers, get frustrated by unorganized speakers, focus on inconsistencies and errors in messages, or shows impatience when speakers ramble.

Time-oriented. Listeners demonstrate time-oriented preferences when they: let others know how much time they have to listen or tell others how long they have to meet.

Methodology and Data Collection

Subjects. Subjects in the present study were drawn from a population of 640 undergraduate students in a southern University enrolled in a basic professional communication class. The majority of class members were freshmen and sophomores. The actual number of participants included in the study was 392.

Administration of the Instrument. The LLP was administered twice to all members enrolled in the professional communication course. During the first administration, the items in the LPP were combined with two other self-administered assessment instruments. The order of all items (for all three individual instruments) was randomly assigned on the combined instrument. Graduate teaching assistants administered the form the first time in groups of 22-26 students in their class laboratory sections. The classes were distributed across all hours of the day, thus the potential for time of day being a confounding variable was minimal.

Approximately 24 hours later, the course instructor administered the LPP to all students a second time. During the second administration the LPP was distributed independently, but the items were in a different randomized order than in the first ad-

ministration. Neither the LPP nor listening concepts were discussed in class between the two administrations of the instrument. The second administration was in two large lecture section groups of 320 students each.

Students were required to put their social security number and gender on the instrument during both class administrations. This allowed the research team to compute test-retest reliability, difference scores, gender specific analyses as well as to gather normative data.

Results

Analysis of the data involved three stages. First, in order to highlight the underlying listening preference orientations, a factor analysis was conducted on the Listener Preference Profile inventory (LPP-14-92). Next, estimates of internal consistency and stability coefficients were computed in order to establish the reliability of the four listening preference orientations. Finally, the prevalence of different listening preference orientations was examined both in the total sample and between genders.

Factor Analysis

The subjects' responses to each of the 14 Listener Preference Profile (LPP-14-92) items were averages across the first and second assessments. These data were then subjected to a principal components factor analysis. This procedure yielded a four factor solution that accounted for approximately 57 percent of the variance.

The simplified factor structure following from oblique rotation is presented in Table 1. As can be seen, the first factor, labeled people-oriented listener preference, was defined by high loadings on four items such as "I focus my attention on the other person's feeling when listening to them." Factor two was defined by our items including "I like the challenge of listening to complex information." The second factor was labeled content-oriented listener preference. Action-oriented listener preference was

the label assigned to the third factor. Factor three was defined by high loadings on four items such as "I am frustrated when others don't present their ideas in an orderly, efficient way." The fourth factor was label time-oriented listener preference and defined by two items including "I begin a discussion by telling others how long I have to meet."

Based on these results, three sets of indices were computed for each of the listener preference orientations. The first set of indices, using the data from the time one assessment (T1), were computed by averaging the items defining each factor (four items for the people, content, and action factors and two items for the time factor). The same procedure was used to compute a parallel of indices for the time two assessment (T2). Averaging the indices from the first and second assessments (combined) yielded a third set of indices. These three sets of indices (T1, T2, and combined) for each of the four listener preference orientations were retained for subsequent analysis.

Reliability Estimates

Two estimates of reliability were computed for each listener preference orientation. First, internal consistency was assessed using Cronbach's test. As can be seen in Table 2, the results of these analyses suggest a considerable degree of internal consistency for each orientation, especially in light of the small number of items involved in each scale. The strongest coefficients emerged for the people, content, and action orientations while the alpha for the time-oriented listener preference was somewhat weaker.

Pearson product-moment correlations were computed between the T1 and T2 assessments as the second estimate of reliability. Presented in Table 2, these test-retest coefficients reveal a moderate to strong relationship between responses provided during the two assessment times indicating substantial stability in the assessment of the listener preference orientations over time.

Distribution of Listener Preference Orientations

In order to explore for patterns in listener preferences, the tertile distribution of each orientation was computed. Respondents scoring within the upper tertile on any of the four orientations were defined as evidencing a preference for that listening style. As can be seen in Table 3, approximately 39 percent of the sample reported a single listener preference with people and action orientations proving the most prevalent. The data also revealed that about a quarter of the sample endorsed two listening preferences and about 15 percent of the respondents were in the upper tertile on three of all four orientations. About 21 percent of the sample failed to indicate a strong preference for any of the orientations.

Differences in the number of male and female respondents scoring in the upper tertile on the listener preferences were also examined. These tests revealed that those endorsing the people orientation were predominantly female while males were more content- and action-oriented. Further, examination of the combined orientations revealed significant gender differences on two of the six dual preferences. More females ($n = 19$) endorsed (chi-square = 3.71, $p < .06$) the people/content combined orientation than males ($n = 8$). Males ($n = 18$), on the other hand, endorsed the action/content orientation more frequently (chi-square = 7.68, $p < .05$) than females ($n = 4$). Finally, as can be seen in Table 3, more males than females reported no particular listener preference.

Content Validity

Content validity is established by determining whether or not an instrument measures what it purports to measure. The LPP addresses listener preference predispositions as related to the approach-avoidance communication construct. It was assumed that the instrument would be multidimensional. The multidimensionality of the

instrument was tested and confirmed through the factor analysis. The preliminary results indicate that the assumptions underlying the development of the LPP-14-92 are empirically sound.

Discussion

This instrument was developed to measure listener preferences. The results of factor analysis identified four listener preference orientations or factors: people, content, action, and time. These listening factors are consistent with the approach-avoidance literature (Burgoon, 1976; McCroskey, 1992) as well as the listening literature suggesting that there are different types of listener goals and purposes (Booth-Butterfield, 1984; Wolvin & Coakley, 1992). The factor loadings for the LPP-14-92 ranged from .56 to .85. The satisfactorily high test-retest reliability estimates obtained for people-oriented (r=.71), content-oriented (r=.76), action-oriented (r=.71), and time-oriented (r=.63) listener preferences suggest stability in the assessment of listener preferences over time.

Gender Differences. Some of the most interesting results are found in Table 3. These data support research which identifies gender differences in task versus relational listening (Booth-Butterfield, 1984; Boice, Hanley, Gansier, Shaughnessy & Dudek, 1984). It appears that the predominant female people-oriented listener preference (20%) is most closely aligned with a relational rather than a task orientation. Conversely, the males' predominant preference, content-oriented (12%) or action-oriented (14%), is most closely aligned with a task orientation. The listener preference profile results also support findings that suggest differences between males and females in conversational sensitivity (Berryman & Wilcox, 1980; Ray & Bostrom, 1990; Wheeless, 1984), interrupting behavior (Esposito, 1979; Kennedy & Camden, 1981; Smeltzer & Watson, 1986), empathy (Hanson & Mullis, 1985; Trotter, 1983), and situa-

tional contexts (Aries, 1987; Carli, 1989; Mabry, 1985). The female people-oriented and the male content- and action-oriented listener preferences support the cognitive processing literature. Females prefer people-oriented listening while males prefer content- or action-oriented listening. The results suggest that men may tend to rely primarily on a dominant left hemisphere during listening while women listen bilaterally (Safer, 1981).

Multiple Preferences. The results suggest that multiple listener preferences are common between listeners. According to the results, 40% of the sample had high scores in two or more preference categories. When there are two or more preferences it is more likely for the preference types of be people/content for females and action/content for males. At this point there is no indication as to whether or not these preferences may compliment or contradict one another. Even so, when demonstrating more than one listener preference, contradictory listening behaviors may be confusing to others.

Listening Avoidance. A significant majority or 21% of the sample indicated no preference for any of the listener orientations. These individuals may tend to avoid listening situations and the results would suggest that these individuals may prefer to receive information through a communication channel other than hearing. Significantly more males (23%) reported no particular listening preference than females (18%). This in part may be attributed to the listening socialization literature which suggests that boys and girls are reinforced for different manifesting communication skills (Booth-Butterfield, 1984; Seiler, Schuelke & Lief-Brilhart, 1984). Listening avoidance is not necessarily a negative trait, but may cause problems if taken to an extreme. The total avoidance of listening, regardless of the situation, context, topic or person involved needs to be examined carefully.

Applications. As a result of this study, an instrument for the measurement and study of listener preferences has been developed. The demonstrated reliability of the Listener Preference Profile instrument suggests that it has potential for a research and/or training tool. However, independent testing of the instrument in conjunction with other tests of communication is needed for complete confidence in the stability of the items and structure.

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Table 1

Listening Preference Profile Inventory Factor Structure

Profile item	Listening preference orientation			
	People	Content	Action	Time
I focus my attention on the other person's feelings when listening to them.	*0.82*	0.05	-0.11	-0.03
When listening to others, I quickly notice if they are pleased or disappointed.	*0.77*	0.16	0.13	0.04
I become involved when listening to the problems of others.	*0.75*	0.08	-0.04	0.03
I try to find common areas of interest when listening to new acquaintances.	*0.65*	0.26	0.14	0.02
I wait until all the facts are presented before forming judgments and opinions.	0.26	*0.63*	-0.20	0.06
I prefer not to listen to technical information.	0.13	*-0.72*	-0.05	0.07
I prefer to hear facts and evidence, so I can personally evaluate them.	0.37	*0.68*	0.26	0.05
I like the challenge of listening to complex information.	0.15	*0.76*	0.24	0.07

Table 1 continues

Table 1 (continued)

Profile item	Listening preference orientation			
	People	Content	Action	Time
I am frustrated when others don't present their ideas in an orderly, efficient way.	0.03	0.14	*0.73*	0.03
When listening to other, I focus on any inconsistencies and/or errors in what's being said.	0.04	0.21	*0.67*	0.05
I jump ahead and/or finish thoughts of speakers.	0.07	-0.23	*0.56*	0.11
I am impatient with people who ramble on during conversations.	-0.04	0.11	*0.72*	0.07
When hurried, I let the other person(s) know that I only have a limited amount of time to listen.	0.05	0.08	0.18	*0.81*
I begin a discussion by telling others how long I have to meet.	-0.02	-0.02	-0.02	*0.85*
Eigenvalues	2.78	2.06	1.70	1.37
Proportion of variance	0.20	0.15	0.12	0.10

Note: This factor structure (correlations) emerged from a principal components analysis followed by oblique rotation. n = 392.

Table 2

Descriptive Statistics and Reliability Estimates for the Four Listening Preference Orientations

Listening preference	Time of Assessment	Mean	Standard deviation	Cronbach alpha	Test/Retest Pearson *r*
People oriented					0.71*
	Time one	3.93	0.53	0.65	
	Time two	3.86	0.52	0.71	
	Combined	3.90	0.48	0.75	
Content oriented					0.76*
	Time one	2.08	0.56	0.59	
	Time two	1.95	0.55	0.62	
	Combined	2.02	0.52	0.67	
Action oriented					0.71*
	Time one	3.25	0.59	0.55	
	Time two	3.26	0.56	0.55	
	Combined	3.26	0.54	0.62	
Time oriented					0.63*
	Time one	2.43	0.66	0.56	
	Time two	2.62	0.66	0.56	
	Combined	2.52	0.59	0.56	

$n = 392$ * $p < .0001$

Table 3

Distribution of Listening Preference Orientations as a Function of Respondent Gender

	Overall[a]		Males[b]		Females[c]		Chi-Square
Orientation	*n*	%	*n*	%	*n*	%	(*df* = 1)
People	44	11	10	4	34	20	12.02*
Content	36	9	27	12	9	5	8.03*
Action	44	11	32	14	12	7	8.20*
Time	28	7	18	8	10	6	1.75
One	152	39	87	39	65	38	2.90
Two	97	25	51	23	46	27	.16
Three	49	12	24	11	25	14	.01
Four	12	3	7	3	5	3	.08
None	82	21	51	23	31	18	4.40*

a $n = 392$
b $n = 220$
c $n = 172$
* $p < .05$